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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4010
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 5287
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9430
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0804
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
ZEN/AMCONSUL SURABAYA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 005917

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FROM AMCONSUL SURABAYA 1311

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SUBJECT: Makassar Killing Sparks Fears of Race Riot

11. (SBU) Summary: Protests led by thousands of university students in Makassar, South Sulawesi against an alleged killing of a local maid by an ethnic Chinese man briefly escalated into a near-riot in the evening of May 9. Police ably negotiated with demonstrators to quickly and peacefully disperse the crowd, and Makassar had returned to normal by evening's end. As of 1200 local time on May 10, local contacts had reported some noisy gatherings--mainly led by students yelling ethnic slurs--but no violent incidents. A large group of students dispersed after police permitted them to meet with the suspect in the killing. Vice President Jusuf Kalla, Makassar's most famous local-boy-made-good, publicly called for calm the evening of May 9, as did a united front of local student leaders from religious organizations. Whether this issue gains further traction and devolves into widespread violence against the city's ethnic Chinese residents remains to be seen; ConGen contacts point to continuing police efforts to quell potential violence and local leaders' determination to keep things calm as important determining factors. ConGen remains in close contact with Amcits resident in Makassar, and will issue a Warden message if necessary. End Summary.

What's the Story?

12. (SBU) Early reports of the incident sparking Tuesday's unrest had cited the recent killing of a wife by her ethnic Chinese husband in a domestic dispute--rumors later circulated that the wife was of local ethnicity. As the situation developed, however, it appears that this was a separate incident unrelated to Tuesday's unrest. According to ConGen contact Aidir Amin Daud, head of the South Sulawesi Election Commission, and local press reports, on May 4 the son of a local shop owner, Wandu Sandiawan, an unemployed ethnic Chinese resident of Makassar aged 24 or 25, severely beat his maid Husniati (also cited as Hasmiati) after she accidentally broke some glass. (Note: Some early media accounts reported that Husniati was also raped, but police have not confirmed this detail, and it was not present in later press reports. End Note.) On May 6, Wandu allegedly discovered Husniati dead in her room, and took her via ambulance to her village in the Sinjai regency about 80 miles from Makassar city. On May 8, police received a report of the killing, and moved to arrest

Wandi the following day; he is being held in Metro Makassar police headquarters (Mapolwiltabes Makassar). According to police, Wandu smiled and laughed while police questioned him regarding the killing, leading them to suspect that he has a mental disorder. Police are bringing in a psychiatrist to examine him.

Police Move Quickly to Stem Unrest

¶3. (SBU) Even media accounts were quick to center on the alleged inter-ethnic nature of the case, with some articles claiming that the killing "smelled like inter-ethnic conflict". Police moved quickly on Tuesday night to close the area surrounding the residence where the killing took place, and deployed thousands of officers to the streets to control potential unrest. Police also said they were guarding Makassar's borders with Gowa and Sinjai regencies as a further precaution. Calls for attacks against stores owned by ethnic Chinese residents apparently circulated widely via text messaging during the day, and some local ethnic Chinese shop owners in the city's centrally located Chinatown area chose to close their doors during the day and into the evening; ConGen received one unconfirmed report from a contact of a shop that remained open and was damaged.

¶4. (SBU) Up to fifteen hundred people reportedly gathered in the street in front of the residence where the killing occurred beginning in the late afternoon local time on 5/9. (Note: Makassar is one hour ahead of Jakarta. End Note.) Police redirected traffic to avoid further congestion. The gathering was

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apparently noisy, but there were no reports of violence. Separately, dozens of students at two local universities--Indonesian Muslim University (UMI) and State Islamic University (IAIN)--attempted to conduct "Sweeping" activity, targeting ethnic Chinese passing in front of the universities. In one unconfirmed report, students at the IAIN pulled aside one ethnic Chinese resident walking in front of the university, and asked him to deliver a short public statement to condemn Husniati's killing. In one incident shown on national television, youths forced an ethnic Chinese man from a vehicle and then had him read a similar statement. (Note: Both UMI and IAIN are known for their relatively constant demonstrations and other student unrest centered on a range of issues, from political to economic. One 2004 riot at UMI, involving a serious clash with local police, prompted the removal of the then South Sulawesi Police Chief. Professors at both institutions have repeatedly bemoaned to ConGen over the years their lack of control over the student body, and the propensity of under-informed, bored students to be an easy flashpoint for unrest on even minor issues. End Note.)

¶5. (SBU) Police continued to patrol local streets throughout the night. On Wednesday May 10, as of 1200 local time in Makassar, groups of students from various local universities were carrying out noisy demonstrations in several areas of the city, ConGen contacts say, but there were no reported violent incidents. A group of approximately one thousand students from several local universities carrying bamboo and wooden sticks demonstrated in front of the Makassar police station where Wandu is being held, but dispersed after police allowed them to meet with him. In a potentially positive sign, one demonstrator threw a rock at an ethnic Chinese-owned shopfront, but was reportedly immediately prevented by fellow demonstrators from taking any further action. Most

shops in Chinatown remained closed. A group of approximately one thousand people were reportedly on their way to the city from Husniati's village.

Local leaders in control

16. (SBU) ConGen contacts credit local leaders' quick public moves to quell the unrest as a key factor in restoring calm and preventing further violence. Vice President Jusuf Kalla, Makassar's best known and most influential native son, gave a press conference on Tuesday at the vice presidential palace in Jakarta to call for calm, which our contacts in Makassar say was closely watched by many residents. Wearing a traditional Makassar shawl, Kalla publicly urged Makassar residents to eschew violence--mentioning specifically that this could negatively affect the city's economy--and pressed police to fully investigate the case in order to bring the perpetrator to justice. Kalla also told reporters he had spoken with the South Sulawesi Governor, police Chief, and Makassar mayor regarding the case. Youth leaders from several religious organizations including the Islamic Students Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam - HMI) and the Union of Indonesian Christian Students (Persatuan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia - PMKRI) also held a joint meeting on May 9 to urge residents--particularly students--to calm down.

Amcits Doing Fine

17. (SBU) ConGen Surabaya was initially alerted to events in Makassar in the early afternoon of May 9 by Makassar area Warden Chris Sperduto, and remains in close and regular contact with him to assess developments and remain abreast of any potential incidents involving Amcits resident in Makassar. There are few Amcits currently living in Makassar. In addition to the Warden, ConGen Surabaya and EmbJakarta officers have spoken to other long-term residents who live near the city center. There are currently no Fulbright scholars in Makassar. An Amcit English Language Fellow was at the IAIN in Makassar on May 9

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when the unrest broke out there and University staff escorted him safely home.

Comment

18. (SBU) Election Commission Chief Daud reminded ConGen that Makassar tends to be particularly sensitive to the dangers of anti-ethnic Chinese sentiment because of past similar incidents, most recently almost ten years ago when an ethnic Chinese man believed to be mentally ill killed the daughter of a professor at the IAIN in Makassar. There were mass riots throughout the city, and many ethnic Chinese-owned shops were looted and destroyed. Neither local police nor military acted to quell the violence, and it was "chaos everywhere," Daud remarked. Despite some seeming parallels, however, Daud and other contacts tell us firmly that this most recent situation is different: Quick and proactive police actions to establish security throughout the city, negotiate with demonstrators, and tamp down on isolated incidents, along with clear and public statements from a range of local leaders, including the influential Vice President, are important and notable differences that may stem future violence. Makassar's unrest-prone student body, notoriously difficult to predict and control, may be the deciding factor in how this situation evolves over the coming

days.

PASCOE